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Conflict in Southern Thailand:
Seed for security sector reform?

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Abstract

This paper explores the prospects for security sector reform (SSR) in Thailand in light of the protracted violent conflict in its southern provinces. The central question is whether the Thai military, known for its past success in ending communist insurgency, has the adaptability and flexibility to cope with the current violent resistance to state authority in the country's south. To answer that, it would be necessary to first understand the context under which the military was successful in quelling the communist insurgency of the past, and the situation in the south today. As this paper shows, the two cases differ in fundamental ways; and the paper concludes with guarded optimism that the military would adjust its conflict management approach to address the challenges posed by the changed circumstances.

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Biography

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She is on the executive committee of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand and is a Senior Fellow of the institute, as well as Advisor to the Thai Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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Contents

1. Introduction

A *coup d'etat* in 1932 marked the end of absolute monarchy in Thailand, and the final days of the concentration of state and political power under one single institution. With that, the tension between the royal-aristocratic elite and the emerging commoner-bureaucratic elite came to characterise Thai politics over the next four decades as the new leadership sought to consolidate their power and protect their interests against threats posed by those ousted in the power struggle.[1] Thailand thus differs from most other Southeast Asian countries in that it did not experience large-scale resistance to colonial rule.[2] Political legitimatisation during the period was also not an issue that involved the public at large.

However, not unlike other states in Southeast Asia, Thailand has periodically experienced armed conflict with insurgent groups: separatist insurgency in the southern region since the 1940s, and communist insurgency beginning in the 1960s. In both cases, the military came to play a prominent role, in line with the militarism in Thai politics that emerged in the context of the Cold War when Thailand was integrated into the American post-war security architecture in Asia.[3]

The military's large-scale suppression operations in the 1960s were a failure, however, forcing it to rethink its doctrine, strategy and tactics. A shift in approach began to be seen in the late 1970s and, in 1980, Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 made it national policy to prioritise political over military actions and emphasised the use of democratic means to fight communism.[4] Under this strategy, the military's role in national security affairs expanded significantly beyond the 'traditional' function of 'defense against external threats and armed insurgencies'.[5]

The new strategy proved successful at containing the violence. However, in Southern Thailand, this changed in 2001, when violence flared, escalating over the next years. The resurgence of violence raises a number of interesting questions for Thailand's security sector governance (SSG):

- What measures were taken to resolve the conflict; and have they helped, or merely served to aggravate the conflict?

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[1] S. Sukatipan, 'Thailand: The evolution of legitimacy', in *Political legitimacy in Southeast Asia: A quest for moral authority*, ed. M. Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).
[2] Ibid.
[3] C. Samudavanija, K. Snitwongse and S. Bunbongkarn, *From armed suppression to political offensive: Attitudinal transformation of Thai military officers since 1976* (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS), Chulalongkorn University, 1990).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 9.

- Given the changes that have taken place in Thailand's domestic politics over the past two decades, how, if at all, has the armed forces' perception of and its approach to how to resolve the conflict changed?
- Have the armed forces' doctrine, strategy and tactics on conflict management in Southern Thailand changed from those that were successful under Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 (1980)?
- How might the circumstances of the southern conflict become the seed for security sector reform (SSR)?

This paper explores these questions through reviewing the changes in the Thai security sector over recent decades and examining the nature of the conflicts in the country. Section 2 describes the evolution of the armed forces to become a core actor in Thailand's internal security affairs. It focuses in particular on the 1980s, when the military achieved success in managing the conflicts in the country. Section 3 discusses the various causes of the conflict in Southern Thailand, exploring them in the context of the domestic political changes since the 1980s. Section 4 discusses SSG in Southern Thailand, looking at the key role of the armed forces and the challenges that they face. Section 5 looks at the differences in context between the earlier conflicts (associated with communist insurgency) and the current conflict in Southern Thailand. This is discussed in terms of four dimensions: the armed forces' perception of and strategy on conflict management; security and governance arrangements; the processes of the justice system with regard to security-related offenses; and international norms including the emergence of the human rights paradigm. This paper concludes by asking if the circumstances facing the military in Southern Thailand could serve as a catalyst for SSR.

2. The Thai military and past conflict management: The change in thinking

The new political leadership after the 1932 *coup* saw the armed forces as a critical actor in achieving the goals of suppressing conservative groups and strengthening the young regime; and the military's role in social and political affairs expanded significantly. Whereas the military prior to 1932 'served as an instrument of the king to safeguard Siam's national integrity vis-a-vis foreign power', it now took on 'a predominant political role of its own'.[6] The new government was also dominated by military officers. Although the Thai military always remained an instrument of the state and not the other way around, the lack of extra-bureaucratic forces to check the military leadership, and the fact that the civilian leaders of the time were in no position to challenge the evolving civil-military dynamics, meant that the military emerged as a centre of power in its own right.[7] Thus, the relationship between the Thai bureaucracy and the military had never been organised hierarchically (with the military under the control of civilian institutions). Instead, they stand in a horizontal relationship,

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[6] Ibid., 16.
[7] Ibid.

whereby the military and the bureaucracy are 'two distinctive sources of coercive and administrative power'. [8] This has had a significant bearing on the mode of conflict management employed by the country's security sector.

That horizontal relationship, and its effects, became evident in the 1960s when the military under the leadership of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959–1963) responded to the communist challenge by basically embarking on a nation-building process.[9] It was believed that lack of government presence in remote areas increased the likelihood of those areas becoming bases for anti-government operations. On the assumption that economic development and loyalty to the government are intertwined, rural development projects were introduced to raise living standards in rural communities and to facilitate better communication with the people through increasing government presence in the community. In other words, the objective was to gain the people's allegiance through promoting their welfare.

The military was seen as the institution most suited to the task of securing such peripheral areas, and the Central Security Command (CSC) was established under the Supreme Command in 1962. The CSC was tasked with coordinating the agencies involved in anti-communist operations; but its priority was to raise the standard of living in remote areas through military civic action initiatives. These programmes involved the combined efforts of military and civilian agencies in implementing development projects and psychological operations in remote villages.

When the first act of overt armed insurgency against government security forces occurred in 1965,[10] the government's misreading of the communist challenge was revealed by its initial response. It instituted 'search and clear' operations and deployed battalion-size units in affected provinces and districts.[11] The failure of these large-scale suppression operations carried out in 1966 led the military to realise that there was a need for more effective coordination of counter-insurgency efforts, and the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) was established.

The CSOC was underpinned by the so-called civilian-police-military (CPM) concept, an American-supported doctrine that couples the allocation of resources to rural areas to the

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[8] M. Beeson and A.J. Bellamy, *Securing Southeast Asia: The politics of security sector reform* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 104.

[9] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression.*

[10] The Communist Party of Thailand launched the 'people's war' in 1965.

[11] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*, 56. Samudavanija et al. noted: 'Ignorance about communism appeared to be common among the military at the time – military officers' perception of communism was heavily influenced by the American point of view which equated communism with Communist China and the Soviet Union, with North Vietnam and Pathet Lao added on subsequently. Their view of Thai communists was therefore that of traitors under direction of foreign powers and undeniably enemies of the country.'

implementation of integrated civil, police and military operations. [12] As such, counter-insurgency efforts were geared towards two types of activities: passive activities, which involved programmes for improving living conditions in affected areas; and active activities, which involved suppression operations and intelligence. This evolved into a formal counter-insurgency doctrine. However, in practice, it was not easy determining the proper mix between the two types of activities. [13]

In early 1967, the 09/10 Plan was launched. Under this plan, the people was the focus of operations: the aim was to win them over to the side of the government. The plan thus involved a combination of passive and active counter-insurgency activities. However, rather than decreasing, the number of communist terrorists and their sympathisers increased dramatically, from an estimated few hundred armed insurgents in 1965 to over 10,000 in 1979. [14] The situation escalated from a phase of terrorism (1965–1969) to a phase identified by the military as revolutionary war (1969–1981).

During the latter phase, it began to be recognised that counter-insurgency efforts that focus on military suppression were counter-productive. Prime Minister's Order 110/2512 issued in 1969 thus emphasised political and psychological measures over suppression measures. [15] However, the ways in which military measures were to supplement psychological and political ones remained unspecified. Also, even after the Order was issued, the military still resorted to the use of force in responding to the student uprising of 14 October 1973 against military dictatorship. Student demonstrations in 1976 were also ruthlessly suppressed, resulting in the bloodbath of 6 October.

Order 110/2512 (1969) notwithstanding, army commanders in charge of the various Communist Suppression Operations Regions (CSOR) largely acted according to their own preferences. Their responses ranged from 'a legalistic approach which dealt with communists as criminals to be brought to trial, to outright suppression aimed at rooting out [communist terrorists] by pure force of arms, to a combination of suppression and development'. [16] Those who believed in the efficacy of forceful suppression made up the majority. Based on their perception of communists as enemies, harsh treatment was meted out to suspects and sympathisers alike. Summary executions, torture and indiscriminate arrests were commonly reported. Therefore, it was not surprising that the new agencies set up to carry out passive measures to win the people over – the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) and Community Development (CD) programmes for example – did not show significant results.

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[12] Ibid. The civilian-police-military (CPM) concept was used to justify transferring the direction of suppression operations from the Supreme Command to the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) after the failure of the large-scale suppression operations carried out in 1966.

[13] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.

[14] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*, 63.

[15] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.

[16] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*, 61.

Although the first official document to stress political over military means was Order 110/2512 (1969), the real turning point in counter-insurgency policy was the enactment in 1978 of a law granting amnesty to those arrested in connection with the military suppression of 6 October 1976. This, together with revisions to the Anti-Communist Act, demonstrated recognition that the repression practised by the ultra-right civilian government that held power prior to a *coup* in 1977 had caused extreme polarisation. These moves signalled a significant shift in thinking and approach – political means were now seen as the appropriate strategy. A Thai newspaper[17] reported that the armed forces considered the year 1978 to be the most successful for its counter-insurgency efforts, with government officials receiving increased cooperation from the people. The military leadership had thus been forced to rethink its doctrine, strategy and tactic as a result of its failures, with the most significant lesson being the importance of political measures in ending the isolation of officials from the people. They learned that the problem of communism cannot be fought merely through military means; the primary stratagem should be a declaration of war against corruption and poverty.

As this line of thinking evolved, Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 was issued in 1980 through a group of officers connected to the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).[18] The Order was hailed for its novel approach to counter-insurgency. Political actions were prioritised over military ones, and there was a shift from 'search and clear' operations to a strategy based on a 'political offensive'. It also laid out operational guidelines to advance the political offensive: 'the elimination of social injustice at all levels; the promotion of harmony of interests among the people; the promotion of political participation; the promotion of all existing democratic movements; the stipulation that armed operations must be commensurate with prevailing conditions while political operations must be uniform; the treatment of [counter-insurgents], defectors or prisoners as fellow countrymen; the obstructing of the [Communist Party of Thailand] from creating a united front in the urban areas, and the stress on dissemination of information, psychological measures, and public relations'.[19]

While Order 66/2523 could be considered a re-enunciation of Order 110/2512, a new dimension was the use of democratic principles to fight communism. Moreover, Order 66/2523 was proclaimed as a national policy that all government agencies were to carry out, and came to be widely enforced by counter-insurgency establishments. The strategy outlined in Order 66/2523 has since become the model for conflict management in Thailand. The success of the approach led to its adoption by the various army regions. A particularly successful implementation of the strategy – the *Tai Romyen* programme – was carried out by the Fourth Army Region in Southern Thailand.[20]

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[17] 'The new face of the Thai armed forces' (in Thai), *Khao Thai Nikorn*, 25 September 1978, p. 11.

[18] The Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) was renamed the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) in 1974.

[19] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*, 70.

[20] Ibid.

By 1984, the military had declared the armed struggle against the communists over, and its focus had shifted to promoting the development of a full-fledged democracy. Its broadly defined task was to build 'an environment for a strong social base and a democratic form of government'.[21] The military was given the responsibility for functions related to national defence, suppression of communist terrorists and the conditions that could lead to revolutionary war, and promotion of social justice and development. Mass mobilisation programmes in the context of building democracy (with the King as head of the state) were developed to supplement the military's own resources. Order 66/2523 (1980) – and later on Order 65/2525 (1982), which set out the guidelines for a 'political offensive' – provided the impetus and rationale for such programmes. As a result of these developments, the military's involvement with political functions, hitherto temporary, became more entrenched.

In practice, the development of mass mobilisation programmes resulted in a larger role for the mass organisations that had been part of the country's counter-insurgency measures. The three major mass organisations at that time were the Thai National Defense Volunteers (TNDV), the Volunteer Development and Self-Defense Villages established since the days of armed suppression, and the Military Reservist for National Security (MRNS). According to the ISOC's 1988 annual report, the number of trained volunteers under the TNDV programme totalled 1,226,000 while those that were part of the Volunteer Development and Self-Defense Villages totalled 8,465.[22] The expansion of mass psychological operations was a crucial part of the mass mobilisation efforts, and the role of the paramilitary force was extended in accordance with Order 66/2523 and 65/2525 to cover a civilian role that involved civic action and development as well as civic political education through training programmes and entertainment.

The army's efforts also went beyond the mass level. The call by the Army's Directorate of Civil Affairs, which was established in 1982, for a constitutional amendment to extend 'the interim clauses which would maintain the military balance vis-a-vis the politicians' appeared to be an attempt to directly intervene so as to steer national politics (in the direction of democracy as it defined it).[23] This was seen again in October 1987, when the ISOC proposed constitutional amendments justified within a similar context of national security. The restructuring of the ISOC to shift its function from policy implementation to policymaking, while a reflection of the army's intention to utilise the ISOC as an instrument for political change, was also justified as being in line with Order 66/2523. For this reason, it was observed that the 'ISOC's announced role as promoter of democratic values … made it the institution that would carry out the military's political role'.[24]

On the southern front, guerrilla activities in rural Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala, which had increased in the 1960s and 1970s, waned towards the end of the 1980s after intensive

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[21] Ibid., 80.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 81.
[24] Ibid., 112.

government campaigns conducted over almost two decades. Along with the counter-insurgency approach stressing the goal of political accommodation over military action, an overhaul of security and governance structures had been undertaken in 1981. A new administrative system coordinated by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) was established. This involved the creation of a joint taskforce with civil, military and police components to coordinate security operations, promote development projects, and advance the approach of increasing political participation. As part of this strategy, an initiative was launched to draw sympathy away from separatist groups, and broad amnesty was offered and granted.

The security and governance arrangements coordinated by the SBPAC effectively contained the violence in Thailand's south for two decades (from the late 1980s). The recurrence of the violence in 2001 and 2004, and its escalation in 2005–2006, was thus perceived by the Thai security sector as stemming from the dissolution of the SBPAC in 2002, and with this came the idea that the violence was of the same nature as that previously handled successfully by the SBPAC as an internal security issue. Reflecting this line of reasoning, the need to deal with the dramatic escalation of the insurgency in the three southern provinces was cited as one of the reasons for a *coup* in 2006.[25]

The conflict in the south continues to take up increasing state resources that could be better allocated to welfare and development, and the government's inability to resolve the conflict and restore the people's sense of security have reflected poorly on the Thai security sector. It is thus important to discuss SSG within the three southern provinces, particularly the approach that the Thai security forces have taken to manage the conflict and the institutional structures that are currently in place, and this will be taken up in section 4. The next section briefly reviews the various explanations for the recurrence of violence in Southern Thailand.

3. Causes of the southern conflict

The current conflict in Southern Thailand is centred on three provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, where 80 per cent of the population are Muslim Malay-speaking natives. The recurrence of violence after a period of relative peace has received much attention from the academic as well as security community. Of particular interest is why the violence became more acute after 2004.[26] There have been a range of reasons given to explain this,[27] which McCargo has grouped into five categories.[28]

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[25] Beeson and Bellamy, *Securing Southeast Asia*.
[26] According to official records, there were a total of 1,975 violent incidents from 1993 to 2004. Between January 2004 and the end of August 2007, there were 2,566 deaths and 4,187 injuries. As of June 2011, 4,750 people have been killed and 7,786 more injured. Respectively from: A. Croissant, 'Unrest in South Thailand: Contours, causes, and consequences since 2001', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 27, no. 1 (2005): 21–43; P. Chalk, *The Malay-Muslim insurgency in Southern Thailand – Understanding the conflict's evolving dynamic* (Rand Counterinsurgency Study, paper no. 5, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008); Deep South Watch, http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/english

The first category of explanations is banditry and lawlessness, which are further elaborated into arguments of conspiracies that involve 'incident creation' by 'organized criminals, government officials, and local politicians' basically as a means of 'benefit-seeking'. [29]

Grievance is the second. According to grievance-oriented explanations, violence is triggered by contests over resources, economic deprivation and social exclusion. A more sophisticated version of the grievance-oriented explanation views socioeconomic issues in relation to identity, ethnicity, culture and religion. The argument centres on the idea that violent rebellion is a response to 'attempts to suppress or marginalize Malay Muslim identity'.[30]

The third category of explanations places the southern conflict within Thailand's wider political environment – that of the conflict between the government of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2006) and forces loyal to the monarchy. However, rather than providing a comprehensive explanation of the violence, such arguments usually describe how a new political space for the militant movement was created by such wider political developments.[31]

The fourth category of explanations posits that external factors such as international jihadist networks are the determinants of violence, although there is little evidence to support this claim.

The final category, which McCargo finds the most persuasive and takes as the core explanation, is that the conflict in Southern Thailand is 'animated by broadly the same "separatist" aspirations that underpinned early waves of conflict in the region'.[32] McCargo argues that the escalation of the southern conflict was sparked by 'a complex political

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[27] Croissant, for example, argues that the drift towards militancy within the three southern provinces in recent years must be explained by factors other than 'historical concerns, religious differences and social and economic marginalization'. While these factors contribute to a latent crisis in inter-ethnic relations, those that account more for the recent increased violence are seen to be the 'recent Islamization of Muslim minority identity, policy failures of the sitting government and low quality conflict management'. According to Croissant, these are the factors that have brought about several changes – such as new opportunities and heightened incentives, and an enabling environment – which have in turn contributed to the growth in insurgency. Croissant, 'Unrest in South Thailand'.

[28] D. McCargo, *Tearing apart the land: Islam and legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).

[29] Ibid., 6. According to McCargo, explanations that focus on banditry and lawlessness 'fail convincingly to account for a violent conflict in which over three thousand people have been killed, many of them members of the security forces, government officials, and Malay Muslims who could be portrayed as supporting or collaborating with the Thai state. These theories also conveniently absolved ordinary Malay Muslims of involvement or complicity in the violence, which was portrayed as an elaborate elite game'.

[30] Ibid., 6. McCargo, however, points out that 'grievance-based explanations completely fail to explain the upsurge of violence in the South in the new millennium – at a time when rubber prices were high, when many Malay Muslims were better off than ever before, and when identity issues were nothing new'.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 7.

problem centered in questions of legitimacy'.[33] Specifically, according to this explanation, the current violence is rooted in 'an assault on the legitimacy of the palace'[34] by Thaksin. When Thaksin dismantled the SBPAC in 2002 in a bid to disperse the 'network monarchy', namely, the web of lieutenants and supporters loyal to the monarchy in the south,[35] he also unravelled the set of political and security arrangements that had been responsible for putting a lid on the separatist violence in the region. His administration's repressive response to the violent rebellion in the south – illustrated by the 2004 Krue Se Siege and Takbai incident (discussed in greater detail in the next section) – exacerbated the situation.

Recent perspectives,[36] however, attribute the violence in Southern Thailand to a combination of inter-related activities and incidents from three main sources: separatist insurgents, politically motivated militant movements, and militants connected to organised crimes (mainly illegal dealings in narcotics and small arms). While each group acts to its own ends, the outcomes serve a common purpose of challenging state legitimacy. Therefore, while the separatist insurgent groups are assessed to be small in number, the violence they instigate is strengthened and perpetuated by incidents generated by the other two groups. They all feed into one another's cause, existence and mission.

4. Security actors and the challenges of security sector governance (SSG)

Under the SSG concept, increasing attention has been given to the challenges of internal security as a barrier to political, economic and social development. Along with that comes the notion that it is important for states to tackle political, socioeconomic and security dimensions simultaneously if they are to 'create the condition in which they can escape from a downward spiral' towards 'insecurity, criminalization and under-development'.[37] The recognition of this inextricable link between security and development has led to 'greater focus and scrutiny of how security and justice are provided'.[38]

A case in point is the 2006 report by the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC)[39] set up to investigate the escalating violence and make policy recommendations. While noting the

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[33] Ibid., 183.

[34] Ibid., 9.

[35] Ibid., 8. McCargo uses the term 'network monarchy' to describe the supporter networks in the deep south, which included 'Buddhist government officials and Fourth Army officers, most of whom supported the Democrat Party, along with a group of Muslim leaders'.

[36] Interview with Colonel Dr Nares Wongsuwan, Director, Department of Research, Development and Graduate Studies, National Defence Studies Institute, June 2011.

[37] Y. Uesugi, 'Conceptualizing peacebuilding and security sector governance' (paper prepared for discussions at a workshop to review revised chapters for the book on Peacebuilding and Security Sector Governance in Asia, Bangkok, 2–4 December 2010).

[38] Uesugi, 'Conceptualizing peacebuilding'.

[39] The National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) under former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun held, between 8 April 2005 and 3 April 2006, 28 main meetings, 4 in the southern provinces. However, the bulk of the detailed work was done by seven sub-committees: Truth, Justice and Human Rights; Conflict Management

individual, structural and cultural conditions contributing to the southern conflict,[40] the report more specifically suggested that justice-related grievances should be properly addressed, and that doing so could help ameliorate the violence substantially.[41] The report identified the primary problems as 'injustice at the hands of state officials and shortcomings in the judicial process'.[42]

As this section examines the security challenges facing the security sector of Southern Thailand, it would be useful to first of all identify the relevant security actors. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines security governance as 'the organization and the management of the security sector'.[43] In this regard, the security sector involves 'all the bodies whose main responsibility is the protection of the state and its constituent communities', with the core structures of the security sector being, other than the armed forces, the police and the intelligence agencies.[44] Also included within the security sector are institutions that formulate, implement and oversee internal and external security policy, such as 'judicial and penal institutions and elected and duly-appointed civil authorities responsible for control and oversight, such as Parliament, the Executive, the Defence Ministry'.[45] It is within this state-centric view of the security sector that the Thai security sector is commonly understood, with the state viewed as having 'monopoly over the legitimate means of coercion'.[46]

There are thus a range of actors in the security sector: state and non-state security providers, as well as state and non-state oversight institutions. Among these, the Royal Thai Armed Forces have always played a dominant role (See Table 1 for an overview of Thailand's security sector). This section thus focuses on Thailand's armed forces, examining the approaches they have used, and linking them to the different stances taken on the conflict and the prevailing security and governance arrangements.

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through Peaceful Means; Development Approaches for Human Security; Power of Cultural Diversity in Thai Society; Unity and Reconciliation in the Area; and Communication with Society.

[40] A. Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform: The case of Southern Thailand' (International Seminar: Challenges of Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/SSR), Bangkok, Thailand, 26–28 June 2011).

[41] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*.

[42] Ibid., 89.

[43] H. Hanggi, 'Making sense of security sector governance', in *Challenges of security sector governance*, ed. H. Hanggi and T.H. Winkler (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003), 8.

[44] Ibid., 8.

[45] Ibid., 9.

[46] Ibid., 9.

Table 1: Thailand's security sector.

Executive and civil management jurisdictions	• Prime Minister as Chair of the National Security Council. • National Security Council, which includes the Vice President, Minister of Defence, Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Transportation, Minister of Interior, Military Supreme Commander, Secretary of the National Security Council. • National Intelligence Agency (NIA). • Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) (under the authority of the Office of the Prime Minister). • Four main ministries: Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice. • The Prime Minister's Office, Budget Bureau, National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), State Audit Commission, Civil Service Commission (CSC). • Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment, Ministry of Information Technology, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Ministry of Commerce. • The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC). • Royal Thai Police: Immigration Bureau.
Legislative bodies	• Senate Committees on National Defense and Security; Public Order and Illegal Drugs; and Foreign Affairs. • House Committees on National Defense; Public Order and Safety; and Foreign Affairs.
Justice and law enforcement institutions	• Supreme Court of Thailand: Courts of Appeal [a], Courts of First Instance[a], Constitutional Court, Administrative Court. • Ministry of Justice: Narcotics Control Board, Rights and Liberties Protection Department. • National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) (provides prosecution functions for the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions). • Ministry of Interior: Department of Corrections. • Office of the Attorney General (under direct supervision of the Prime Minister). • Department of Special Investigation (DSI). • Election Commission of Thailand (ECT). • Military Court (tries and adjudicates cases involving persons within its jurisdiction as prescribed by the Act for the Organization of the Military Court B.E. 2498 (1955)).
Statutory security forces	Royal Thai Armed Forces with its major services: • Army: Paramilitary forces (Rangers, Village Scouts, Red Guard). • Navy: Royal Thai Marine Corps. • Air Force. • Royal Thai Police: Border Patrol Police (BPP) Bureau.
Independent oversight agencies	• Thailand Human Rights Commission (with investigative and training functions but not prosecutorial ones). • Ombudsman.
Civil society organisations	• Policy and advocacy research organisations dealing with various aspects of security (broadly defined) in and out of government. These are generally based in universities. Examples include the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS). • Lawyers Council of Thailand. • Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with areas such as human rights, development, natural disaster (emergency relief, rehabilitation, prevention), epidemics, human trafficking, drug trafficking, terrorism.

Note: [a] These courts are part of the process leading to the Supreme Court, but are separate from the Constitutional Court and the Administrative Court.
Source: Compiled by author.

As the key security actor, the incidents weighing heavily on the armed forces' track record are the Krue Se Siege and the Takbai incident. The Krue Se Siege on 28 April 2004 resulted in the death of 108 attackers, 31 of whom were shot after seeking refuge in the central Krue Se mosque, one of the most revered Islamic religious sites in Southeast Asia. The Takbai incident of 25 October 2004 started with a mass protest at the Takbai police station in Narathiwat. Some 1,300 demonstrators were rounded up and stacked in trucks for transport to a Royal Thai Army detention camp, with the result that at least 78 died from asphyxia.[47]

To counter the increase in violence following these incidents, the government issued the 2005 State of Emergency Decree. With the security force governing under the provisions of the decree, processes normally within the purview of the police and court system became open to military participation.[48] The security sector gained wider authority to detain and use force against suspected insurgents in the three southern provinces. More importantly, the fact that the decree has been extended more than 20 times at three-month intervals significantly impinges on individuals' constitutional rights as exceptionalism became the rule.[49]

Such measures that the Thai security sector have taken to curb the violence since the decree came into force have so far not yielded the intended results. There have been complaints of checkpoint procedures leading to arbitrary arrests and also concerns over the high number of arrest warrants issued under the decree.[50] Security operations have involved detention centres located within military camps, and there have been reports of torture and use of detention as an intelligence-gathering technique at these centres.[51] Court records show a high percentage of indictments but a low rate of conviction as arbitrary arrests and lack of evidence result in defendants being acquitted, or more commonly, charges dropped by order of the court.[52] This has strained the justice system. At the same time, the role and functional effectiveness of the security forces have come under question – not least whether they themselves have become one of the factors aggravating the conflict.

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[47] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.

[48] Interview with Prof. Amara Pongsapich, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Bangkok, June 2011.

[49] V. Muntarbhorn, 'Panel on analysis of security laws and its implications' (presentation at a forum on Security Laws: Opportunities and Challenges for Conflict Resolution, Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS), Chulalongkorn University,11 October 2010); Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'. According to Thailand Human Rights Commission Chair Prof. Amara Pongsapich, the special laws now being enforced in Southern Thailand include the Revolutionary Decree (1914), the Emergency Decree (2005) and the Internal Security Act (2008) – all of which are seen to provide opportunities for authorities to adopt measures that affect human rights– such as detention without bail or legal counsel.

[50] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Interview with Ms Naree Jaroenpolpiriya, peace mediator, February 2011.

Although the NRC report identified the issue of justice as a key element in the southern conflict,[53] the security community remained in favour of tough legal measures from the perspective that 'the violence remained essentially a security problem'.[54] It was deemed necessary to 'confront the problem head-on' using the 2005 emergency decree or through 'the systematic arrest of "ringleaders" and front-line militants'.[55] Clearly, there was a divide in views on how to approach the southern conflict: between those who perceived the crisis to be essentially a political problem and those who were adamant that it was in effect a mainstream security problem.[56] When the NRC proposed modest measures to improve 'the quality of justice, security, and governance'[57] in June 2006, it was criticised for being 'too unwieldy, conservative and timid to firmly address the causes of the crisis, the question of agency, and the need for a political settlement'.[58] Not much came out of the effort. The Prime Minister lacked the intention to follow the NRC's recommendation,[59] and the NRC's proposals were viewed by most government officials as 'too progressive'. On the other hand, for most Malay Muslims, they 'did not go nearly far enough'.[60] According to McCargo, it was a sadly lost opportunity.[61]

Another challenge is the tension between the different perspectives on the root cause of the southern conflict, fundamentally between the view that it is a 'struggle over issues of justice' and the standpoint that it is 'an expression of political aspirations by the Malay Muslim community'.[62] While the Thai security sector remains divided on this, the balance is tilted toward the former: when compared to the issue of governance, justice more readily provides the ground on which everyone can agree. It has thus become the common reference point for the security sector, through which specific grievances could be addressed and focused implementation could be achieved.[63] At the same time, the issue of political aspiration – the desire for some form of autonomy – remained an issue that, while not publicly articulated by the Malay Muslim community, was nevertheless a known fact among the security forces.[64]

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[53] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*.
[54] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission'.
[55] Ibid., 86.
[56] Ibid.
[57] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, 10.
[58] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 89.
[59] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.
[60] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, 10; McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 84.
[61] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 89. McCargo listed the causes of this sadly lost opportunity: 'From the outset, the 50-member [Commission] … was too large and unwieldy to function effectively. At the most basic level, there was a lack of trust and openness among the Commission's members, which curtailed frank discussions. Because the political dimensions of the conflict were seen as off-limits, for a variety of cultural and historical reasons, the NRC produced a report that emphasized issues of justice, but failed to engage with the core questions underpinning the violence … (H)owever well-intentioned, the Thai commission lacked clear goals, and was rather disappointing in its achievements'.
[62] Ibid., 79.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Interview with Ms Naree Jaroenpolpiriya, peace mediator, February 2011.

5. Past successes, present failures

With the armed forces remaining a key player in matters of internal security, particularly those involving violence and requiring the use of force, its presence on tasks related to the conflict in Thailand's southern provinces has been the norm. Organisationally, the three southern provinces had been part of the area under the Fourth Army Region's command, until a re-organisation in 2009 placed Narathiwat under the First Army Region, Pattani under the Second Army Region, and Yala under the Third Army Region, while the Fourth Army Region was put in command of Songkhla.[65] An important issue in this regard is the annual rotation of the armed forces, which has been observed to have both positive and negative consequences.[66] On the one hand, the rotation is seen to lessen the opportunity for the military to become involved in organised crimes within its area of command. On the other, with the process of establishing trust being disrupted on a regular basis, it becomes impossible to develop sustained civil-military relations.

The Thai armed forces, and particularly the army, have had a good track record with regard to counter-communist insurgency operations, especially in the 1980s when it was instrumental in setting up the SBPAC. Against this, the following section examines the armed forces' current handling of the southern conflict. Following that, this paper attempts to point out the implications for SSR prospects (section 6).

5.1 The armed forces: Unchanged mindset

In the midst of the divide between the two broad approaches to the southern conflict discussed in section 4, the armed forces work under the royal injunction to 'understand, access, develop'.[67] This approach is similar to the one successfully implemented by the armed forces to handle communist insurgency under Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 (1980). That earlier strategy was one developed in response to the conditions then in place, namely, a crisis that was ideological in nature, where the protagonists were clearly identifiable and where poverty eradication was seen as an important contributor to the alleviation of the ideological conflict.[68]

However, in the case of the southern conflict that began in the early 2000s, the protagonists in the violent episodes have not been as easy to identify. In addition, a political approach has been advocated by 'most members of the NRC, along with a narrow circle of academics, journalists and activists'[69] based on the belief that the crisis is essentially a problem that

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[65] Interview with Colonel Dr Nares Wongsuwan, Director, Department of Research, Development and Graduate Studies, National Defence Studies Institute, June 2011.
[66] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'.
[67] Interview with Prof. Amara Pongsapich, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Bangkok, June 2011.
[68] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.
[69] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 86.

demands a rethinking on 'questions of justice, equity, identity and governance'[70] within the three southern provinces. Such questions are also closely tied to the need for 'a more nuanced understanding of Islam, and recognition of Pattani's distinctive history and cultural differences'.[71]

On top of these differences in the nature of the conflict and the identifiability of the protagonists, the magnitude of the response has also differed. While the counter-insurgency strategy through Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 (1980) was put forward as a national policy to be carried out by all government agencies, measures to address the southern conflict have been limited to the three southern provinces.

At the same time, just like in the 1980s, when regional army commanders pursued their own strategies despite the guidelines laid down by Order 66/2523, the security forces in the south have continued to approach the crisis as essentially a security problem, reflecting the same mindset even after two decades. The persistence of this way of thinking has been attributed to 'complex political ties between Thai authorities and the region, which developed from the late nineteenth century' and which 'continued in the form of tense relationships between Thai security forces and the local population'.[72] Just as during the fight against communist insurgency from the 1960s to the 1980s when most regional commanders believed in the efficacy of forceful suppression,[73] a majority of the security community tackling the southern conflict today consider tough legal measures such as the 2005 emergency decree to be the appropriate solution.[74]

5.2 Security and governance arrangements: The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) established, dismantled, revived

A key element of Southern Thailand's past counter-insurgency efforts was the SBPAC. The SBPAC served as the coordinating body between the central government and the provincial administrative agencies. It also worked closely with the task forces of the CPM Combined Forces 43 (CPM-43) which was set up to coordinate security operations within the southern provinces.[75] By the end of the 1980s, the violence had been reduced to a relatively low level. By the 1990s, with insurgent organisations increasingly discredited because of their attempts to raise funds through avenues such as extortion and criminal activities, the Thai authorities had been able to dismiss such groups as only bandit gangs.[76] The SBPAC was thus seen to

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[70] Ibid., 86.

[71] Ibid., 86.

[72] O.A. Chuah, 'Conflicts and peace initiatives between minority Muslims and Thai Buddhists in the Southern Thailand', *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 3, no. 2 (2010).

[73] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*; Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.

[74] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'.

[75] Interview with Ms Naree Jaroenpolpiriya, peace mediator, February 2011.

[76] Chuah, 'Conflicts and peace initiatives'.

have played an instrumental role in successfully containing the violence in the south over the two decades.

Politically, that was a semi-democratic period, and the granting of amnesty to insurgents who turned themselves over to government authorities marked a real turning point in Thailand's counter-insurgency policy.[77] At the same time however, the operational guidelines of the counter-insurgency policy significantly expanded the role of the military beyond the traditional one of defence against external threats and armed insurgencies, and heightened its involvement in civilian affairs, particularly in rural development (see also section 2, and the expansion of mass mobilisation programmes in the 1980s).

As Thai politics progressed towards the institutionalisation of parliamentary politics, the Thaksin government abolished the SBPAC and placed the police in charge of security in the southern provinces. This 2002 decision coincided with the deterioration of the southern security situation,[78] and has been criticised as a 'politically motivated policy blunder'.[79] As mentioned earlier, this was given as one of the reasons for the *coup* in 2006. In line with the NRC's recommendation,[80] the post-*coup* government emphasised justice, equity, identity and governance in its approach, and focused on reviving the SBPAC.

However, the reinstatement of the SBPAC – while thought to be positive in terms of bringing into being an overarching body that could foster a more integrated policy among ministries, including advisory bodies and financial management[81] – was also criticised as merely 'an attempt to revert to the pre-Thaksin *status quo ante*'.[82] Although well-intentioned, the move to revive the SBPAC reflected a failure on the part of the government to recognise the magnitude of the changes that had occurred in the intervening years. In this connection, while the government adopted the 'language of reconciliation', it also significantly increased the security budgets that brought the three southern provinces firmly under the control of the military through the ISOC.[83] This control was further strengthened when the next elected administration, in an attempt to keep the SBPAC insulated from political interference, placed the SBPAC under the ISOC's control, thus incorporating it into the security apparatus.[84]

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[77] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*.
[78] Interview with Prof. Suchit Boonbongkarn, former Judge of the Constitutional Court, Bangkok, June 2011.
[79] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, 3.
[80] The National Reconciliation Commission's (NRC) recommendation was to re-establish the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center's (SBPAC) positive features in a new agency – the Peaceful Strategic Operation Center for Southern Border Provinces – that would be created to oversee the administration of the three southern provinces.
[81] Interview with Prof. Suchit Boonbongkarn, former Judge of the Constitutional Court, Bangkok, June 2011.
[82] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission'.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

5.3 The justice system and security-related offences

During the post-2006 *coup* administration, militant attacks on Thai security forces became increasingly bolder. The attacks drove out entire Buddhist communities from their homes, forced the Border Patrol Police (BPP) to withdraw from its bases, and caused all government schools in the three southern provinces to shut down.[85] To the security community, the rapidly deteriorating situation confirmed their stand – that the violence was essentially a security problem which must be confronted with tough legal measures like the 2005 emergency decree.[86] Therefore, despite the government's acceptance of the NRC's recommendation that justice and understanding be emphasised over security solutions, and despite the language of reconciliation adopted by the government, security measures continued to be a key component in the handling of the southern conflict and violence.

Repeated renewals of the emergency decree have been a source of concern, as it extended the wide authority given to the military.[87] One of the main criticisms has been the lowering of the standard of evidence required for the issue of arrest warrants. It has been noted that 'criminal law required grounds for suspicion based on evidence before a warrant was issued, the emergency decree required only grounds for suspicion'.[88] It has thus been argued that the 'deep-rooted political violence could not be addressed in the long term by using the criminal justice system'[89] – since lack of confidence in the justice system has itself become a crucial element in the alienation of Malay Muslims from the Thai state.

From the perspective that political legitimacy refers to 'the belief in the rightfulness of a state, in its authority to issue commands, so that the commands are obeyed not simply out of fear or self-interest, but because they are believed to have moral authority, because subjects believe that they ought to obey',[90] such lack of confidence is detrimental to any resolution of the conflict. Without the conviction that the Thai state is morally right and that they are duty-bound to obey it, those residing within the three southern provinces stood to contest the Thai state's right to rule over their everyday lives (which are aligned with their own religious beliefs, Muslim laws and code of conduct rather than those beliefs and practices prevalent in other parts of the Thai nation). The lack of confidence in the legitimacy of the state contributes to the deepening of political tensions, conflicts and violence within what is already a complex political situation.

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[85] Interview with Ms Naree Jaroenpolpiriya, peace mediator, February 2011.
[86] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'.
[87] McCargo, *Tearing apart the land*, 89. McCargo identifies various areas of concern, including how evidence and leads against suspects were identified; how arrests were made and interrogations conducted; how decisions were made concerning prosecutions; how prisoners were kept while awaiting trial or being tried; and how trials themselves were conducted.
[88] Ibid., 91.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Alagappa, *Political legitimacy in Southeast Asia*.

5.4 International norms and human rights

Although Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 (1980) laid down the operational guidelines for a political offensive to tackle the communist insurgency, the on-the-ground reality was that many regional commanders favoured forceful suppression; and reports of summary executions, torture and indiscriminate arrests were common. [91] Given the Cold War environment and the attendant concern with countering the spread of communism, the actions of these regional commanders were never a target of international human rights scrutiny.

Two decades later, military thinking continues to be dominated by a paradigm that holds national security as the ultimate goal.[92] Where personal freedom obstructs national security, human rights must give way to national security.[93] What has changed, however, is the response of the international community. Organisations ranging from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to various human rights groups have raised concerns over 'abuses of local human rights campaigners, failures to properly investigate killings by either side, detentions without trial, disappearances of detained suspects, and an ethos of impunity of army and police officials in the region'.[94]

6. Seed for reform?

The Thai security forces' approach to resolving the southern conflict appears to reflect a thinking that in many ways remains trapped by what had proved successful in the past.[95] This is seen in the reinstatement in 2006 of the SBPAC – a special administrative arrangement that the security sector sees as having played a major part in containing the southern violence for two decades – as well as in the restructuring of the SBPAC through the 2010 Southern Border Provinces Administration Act. Furthermore, while adopting the policy language of reconciliation, the measures employed by the security forces continue to be based on the aim of assimilation,[96] and this is where the southern sense of historical grievance remains a latent source of conflict.

Chuah's observation that 'the sense of historical grievance, manifest in ethno-national confrontation from the 1940s to the 1980s, continued to animate political leaders in the

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[91] Samudavanija et al., *From armed suppression*.
[92] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Chuah, 'Conflicts and peace initiatives'.
[95] Interview with Prof. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Committee on Reform Strategy, Bangkok, October 2010.
[96] Chuah, 'Conflicts and peace initiatives'. According to Chuah, '[m]any officials continued to equate demands relating to cultural expression of Malay identity with demands for political separatism; their response was to suppress that identity. Promotion of the Thai language through education and the media was central to this effort. Teachers instructed their primary and secondary students to identify themselves as Thai Muslims rather than Malay Muslims'.

region and to shape popular conceptions of discrimination toward ethnically Malay Muslims'[97] reflects the remaining source of conflict particular to the southern situation. While the counter-insurgency measures introduced in the 1980s – the result of the military's bold move to rethink its doctrine and strategy – had brought an end to the insurgency, its impact did not quite extend to overcoming that sense of historical grievance.

After more than two decades of institutionalised parliamentary politics, Thailand's political landscape is much different from that of the 1980s. Decentralisation and increased local participatory politics have greatly transformed the structure of local political-power relations. Transformation of local governance through the system of provincial Chief Executive Officer (CEO) governor and populist policies for the local population was notable during the Thaksin administration. Public Administration Regulations Act, B.E. 2545 (2002) and the Royal Decree on Criteria and Procedures for Good Governance, B.E. 2546 (2003) also led to the decentralisation of budget and development planning, and gave local authorities control over their own plans and budgets.

Given the serious nature of the violence in the south, the need for the military to embrace the role of frontline security actor appeared to have taken priority over the controversies of its approach to conflict resolution. The Thai public and other security actors willingly accepted, by default, military control of the security apparatus. There seemed to be no opposition against the tremendous increase in security budgets after the 2006 *coup*; and, when the SBPAC was placed under the control of the ISOC by the post-*coup* elected administration, the military undeniably became the main security force in the south.

However, the relentless and continuing violence raises the question of the relevance of the military's doctrine and strategy. Has the time come for another bold rethink? Human rights advocates have certainly voiced the need, a line of thought echoed by McCargo:

> More than ever, Thailand needed a bold and imaginative set of ideas for resolving the Southern crisis. The lineaments of such a solution could involve understanding the conflict as a regional, not simply a domestic problem; and thinking seriously about alternative forms of substantive political devolution.[98]

However, although the notion of a need for a paradigm shift appears to have gained some traction within the security policy community, such a change has not taken hold at the operational level.[99] A 'bold and imaginative' idea – to frame the southern conflict within a regional context – became a lost opportunity in 2004 when, invoking ASEAN's non-interference doctrine, Thaksin dismissed such a move. Any attempt since then has yet to 'firmly address the causes of the crisis, the question of agency, and the need for political

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[97] Chuah, 'Conflicts and peace initiatives'.
[98] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 89.
[99] Pongsapich, 'Security sector governance and reform'; Discussions at the International Seminar: Challenges of Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/SSR), Bangkok, Thailand, 26–28 June 2011.

settlement'.[100] Even at the time of the 2006 *coup,* the security community continued to confront the crisis with tough legal measures such as the 2005 emergency decree.

However, the proliferation of 'failed communities',[101] while proving the security community's approach ineffective, has also made more salient the arguments of those who have questioned such security-oriented solutions. Nevertheless, a political approach alone is unlikely to help make up for shortcomings in the security apparatus. From this perspective, the military's key role in the southern crisis and its ASEAN military network places it at the forefront of potential agents of change.

7. Conclusion

The armed forces had successfully tackled the country's communist insurgency problem in the 1980s through employing the then novel approach of prioritising political over military actions in combination with the use of democratic mechanisms to fight communism. However, the tremendous changes within the Thai political landscape since then have called into question the continued relevance of that strategy. Of particular note are the significant differences between the communist insurgency of the 1960s–1980s and the southern separatist insurgency that recurred in the early 2000s – in terms of political environment, social landscape and the purpose of the insurgency.

While the communist insurgency was a battle for control over state power with the intention to rearrange state social and economic power relations according to communist ideology, it did not reject the Thai state, society or nation. The armed separatist insurgency of the three southern provinces, however, is driven by a rejection of the Thai state and the reluctance to be integrated into the larger Thai society within the context of a Thai nation. The southern conflict is thus of a higher degree of complexity than the past battle against communist insurgency in other parts of Thailand.

A host of variables fuel southern separatist sentiment, including diversity in ethnicity, religion, language, historical memories, attachment to locality within a clear boundary, differences in level of development and notions of economic development, as well as diversity in livelihoods and the way of life. Consequently, the approach successfully used to counter communist insurgency may lose relevance and robustness when applied to the very different context obtaining in the southern conflict. The problem is not whether there is an SBPAC to integrate the work of various agencies and units, but rather whether the existing institutional arrangements, under whatever title, working by means of whichever approach, could help resolve the roots of the conflict.

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[100] McCargo, 'Thailand's National Reconciliation Commission', 89.
[101] Ibid., 83. McCargo refers to failed communities as communities no longer able to provide basic protection for their members, or even for hostages.

The tools available to the armed forces – whether military or political, whether through the TNDV or its mass psychological operations to instil Thai national ideology – may not be the most appropriate for resolving the southern conflict; whether the root of the tensions is perceived to be justice, identity and existence as a Muslim community, or cross-border militants associated with organised crimes. It is even doubtful whether local decentralisation could address the root causes of the violence. Given that military thinking continues to be dominated by the view that the conflict is a security problem when expert analyses suggest the need to also consider questions of justice, equity, identity and governance, what is evident is that the armed forces should not by any means be the principal security actor responsible for conflict management. Rather, there is a need for competent and just governance founded on respect for diversity in thinking and culture – a quality that Thai society appears to lack.

At the same time, military support remains vital. In this regard, the persistent violence in Thailand's southern region justifies another paradigm shift in the security sector's approach to conflict management. However, SSR is unlikely to occur without the military's willingness to take on such changes and without its interest in prioritising the issues that must be resolved (according to their urgency and degree of importance). One of the most significant factors that could drive change is the tremendous increase in the state security budget in recent years. It needs to be remembered however that the budget increase could also prove to be a disincentive to the military; as the budget recipient, it would not be to its benefit to take steps that would bring about changes in the status quo. Such issues would have to be addressed.